EVOLUTION OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

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Abstract. The foreign policy objectives of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) include creating favorable conditions for the functioning of the Islamic state, establishing Iran as a regional center of power, and strengthening and promoting the Iranian Shiite model of social development. At the same time, the Iranian leadership's commitment to the fundamental principles established by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini does not preclude pragmatism and flexibility in foreign policy decision-making. This has contributed to the evolution of certain aspects of Iran's foreign policy, particularly its relations with the West. Such changes have been especially evident in the adjustment of foreign policy priorities under different Iranian presidents. Thus, the evolution of Tehran's foreign policy can be viewed as the result of the interaction between domestic, regional, and global factors and the fundamental principles established with the creation of the Islamic Republic in 1979.

Keywords: Islamic Republic of Iran, foreign policy, export of the Islamic Revolution, Masoud Pezeshkian, JCPOA.

ЭРОН ИСЛОМ РЕСПУБЛИКАСИ ТАШҚИ СИЁСАТИНИНГ ЭВОЛЮЦИЯСИ

Аннотация. Эрон Ислом Республикаси (ЭИР) ташқи сиёсатининг асосий мақсадлари исломий давлатнинг барқарор фаолият юритиши учун қулай шароитларни таъминлаш, Эронни минтақавий куч марказига айлантириш, шунингдек, Эроннинг шиалик ижтимоий тараққиёт моделини мустаҳкамлаш ва тарғиб этишдан иборат. Шу билан бирга, мамлакат раҳбариятининг Оятуллоҳ Руҳуллоҳ Хумайний томонидан асос солинган фундаментал тамойилларга содиқлиги ташқи сиёсий қарорлар қабул қилишда прагматизм ва мослашувчанликни истисно этмайди. Бу ҳолат Эрон ташқи сиёсатининг айрим йўналишлари, айниқса Ғарб давлатлари билан муносабатларида муайян эволюция юз беришига олиб келган. Бундай ўзгаришлар, хусусан, Эрон президентларининг ташқи сиёсий устуворликлари ўзгариши билан боғлиқ ҳолда ташқи сиёсатнинг айрим йўналишларига тузатишлар киритилишида яққол намоён бўлди. Шу тариқа, Теҳрон ташқи сиёсатининг эволюциясини мамлакатдаги ички, минтақавий ва глобал омилларнинг ўзаро таъсири ҳамда 1979 йилда Эрон Ислом Республикаси ташкил этилган даврда шаклланган фундаментал тамойилларнинг ўзаро боғлиқлиги натижаси сифатида баҳолаш мумкин.

Калит сўзлар: Эрон Ислом Республикаси, ташқи сиёсат, Ислом инқилобини экспорт қилиш, Масъуд Пезешкиён, Ядровий дастур бўйича қўшма комплекс ҳаракатлар режаси (JCPOA).

The fundamental principles of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) are based on the country's Constitution, adopted in 1979, and on the general guidelines of Iran's long-term development programs. These principles include the formulation of foreign policy according to Islamic values, the preservation of national independence, opposition to foreign domination, continuation of the

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principles of the Islamic Revolution, opposition to a unipolar international order, the development of Iran as a regional center of power, support for the political independence of regional states, and solidarity with Muslim and oppressed peoples, particularly the Palestinian people. The general framework of Iranian foreign policy has remained relatively stable since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. This continuity is largely connected with the political role of the Supreme Leader, who determines the main strategic directions of the country's foreign policy.[1] At the same time, Iranian foreign policy combines ideological principles with pragmatic considerations. Its practical implementation has changed depending on domestic political developments, regional conflicts, international circumstances, economic conditions, and the approaches of individual presidents.

During the first post-revolutionary period, particularly in the 1980s, Iran pursued a strongly ideological and independent foreign policy based on the principle of "Neither East nor West." Relations with the United States were severed after the hostage crisis in Tehran, while relations with many Western countries deteriorated. One of Tehran's major objectives during this period was the promotion and expansion of the ideas of the Islamic Revolution beyond Iran, particularly among neighboring Muslim countries. The Iran–Iraq War and international sanctions further strengthened Iran's perception of external threats and contributed to the development of a regional network of political and military partners. During the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani in 1989–1997, Iranian foreign policy became more pragmatic. The economic consequences of the Iran–Iraq War and international isolation encouraged Tehran to reduce tensions with other states and expand economic cooperation. Iran began to place greater emphasis on relations with neighboring countries, the wider Islamic world, and major international powers. Relations with the Soviet Union also developed during this period, reflecting Tehran's broader effort to diversify its foreign partnerships.

Under President Mohammad Khatami from 1997 to 2005, Iran continued its policy of engagement with the international community.[2] Khatami promoted the idea of a "Dialogue among Civilizations" and sought to improve Iran's international image through diplomatic and cultural initiatives. His administration attempted to establish more constructive relations with Western countries and encouraged greater international cooperation. Iran's approach during this period represented a significant reduction in confrontational rhetoric and a greater emphasis on diplomacy. Nevertheless, these efforts did not lead to a fundamental normalization of relations with the United States or to the removal of major economic sanctions. The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 marked another change in Iran's foreign-policy approach. His administration emphasized Iran's role as an independent and influential regional power and placed greater attention on relations with Muslim countries and states

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[1] The Main Axes of Iran's Foreign Policy Toward the Palestinian- Israeli Conflict // Valdai Club. URL: https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the-main-axes-of-i (accessed: 22.09.2026).

[2] Резолюция GA/RES/53/22 // Организация Объединенных Наций | Мир, достоинство и равен
ство на здоровой планете. URL: https://www.un.org/ru/ga/53/docs/53res_nocte.shtml (дата
обращения: 22.09.2026).

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outside the Western political sphere. Iran's nuclear and space programs became important elements of its international policy. At the same time, Tehran adopted a more confrontational position toward Israel and continued to strengthen its regional partnerships. These developments contributed to increased international pressure and the introduction of additional sanctions against Iran. The growing tensions surrounding Iran's nuclear program and its relations with the United States and European countries contributed to the election of Hassan Rouhani in 2013. His administration pursued a more moderate and diplomatic approach, particularly toward the West. Rouhani sought to reduce tensions with the international community and to achieve the lifting of economic sanctions through negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. This diplomatic strategy contributed to the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2015. The agreement represented an important stage in Iran's relations with Western countries and temporarily created conditions for greater diplomatic engagement.

The situation changed significantly after Donald Trump became president of the United States. In 2018, the United States withdrew from the JCPOA and restored sanctions against Iran. This decision weakened the diplomatic achievements of the previous period and contributed to a new deterioration in relations between Tehran and Washington. Tensions increased further following the killing of Qassem Soleimani in a U.S. strike in January 2020. These developments strengthened conservative political forces within Iran and contributed to a shift in the country's domestic and foreign-policy environment. The election of Ebrahim Raisi in 2021 reflected the strengthening of conservative forces. His foreign policy combined ideological continuity with pragmatic considerations. Raisi continued to emphasize resistance to U.S. and Israeli influence and the strengthening of Iran's regional partnerships, while simultaneously supporting negotiations concerning the nuclear program. Tehran sought a possible return to the JCPOA framework but insisted that negotiations should focus primarily on the nuclear issue and should not impose restrictions on Iran's regional partnerships or missile program.

Following the death of President Ebrahim Raisi in 2024, Masoud Pezeshkian was elected president. His political approach emphasized reform, diplomatic engagement, and the improvement of relations with both regional and international actors. Pezeshkian expressed support for constructive relations with neighboring states and major global powers, including China and Russia, while also emphasizing the importance of resolving the deadlock surrounding the Iranian nuclear agreement. His foreign-policy vision combined the preservation of Iran's strategic interests with greater diplomatic engagement with the international community. However, the regional security environment significantly complicated the implementation of this approach. The escalation of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict after October 2023, the subsequent regional confrontation, and attacks involving Iran and its regional partners created additional challenges for Tehran. Iran attempted to respond to these developments while avoiding a direct large-scale war that could produce severe political, economic, and security consequences.

The evolution of Iranian foreign policy from 1979 to 2024 demonstrates a combination of continuity and change. The fundamental principles established after the Islamic Revolution, including national independence, resistance to foreign domination, the preservation of the Islamic political system, and Iran's aspiration to play a major regional role, have remained important. At the same time, the practical implementation of these principles has changed under different presidents. Rafsanjani emphasized economic reconstruction and pragmatism; Khatami promoted dialogue and international engagement; Ahmadinejad adopted a more confrontational and regionally oriented approach; Rouhani prioritized diplomacy and negotiations with the West; Raisi combined conservative principles with pragmatic diplomacy; and Pezeshkian emphasized diplomatic engagement and the possibility of

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improving relations with the international community. Therefore, Iranian foreign policy can be understood as a dynamic interaction between ideological continuity and pragmatic adaptation to changing domestic, regional, and international conditions.

Conclusion

The evolution of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran from 1979 to 2024 demonstrates a continuous interaction between ideological principles and pragmatic adaptation. Although the fundamental foundations established after the Islamic Revolution—national independence, opposition to foreign domination, the preservation of the Islamic political system, and the pursuit of regional influence—have remained relatively stable, their practical implementation has changed in response to domestic political developments, economic challenges, regional conflicts, and transformations in the international system. The foreign-policy approaches of successive Iranian presidents reflected these changing circumstances. Rafsanjani emphasized economic reconstruction and pragmatic engagement, Khatami promoted dialogue and international cooperation, Ahmadinejad adopted a more confrontational and regionally oriented approach, Rouhani prioritized diplomacy and negotiations over the nuclear issue, Raisi combined conservative principles with pragmatic considerations, while Pezeshkian emphasized diplomatic engagement and the development of relations with regional and global powers. Thus, the evolution of Iranian foreign policy should not be viewed as a complete departure from the principles of 1979, but rather as their adaptation to changing political and geopolitical conditions. Iran has consistently sought to preserve its strategic autonomy while strengthening its regional position and protecting its national interests. The period from 1979 to 2024 therefore demonstrates that Iranian foreign policy combines long-term ideological continuity with considerable tactical flexibility.

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